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# Ambiguities of global civil society

LOUISE AMOORE AND PAUL LANGLEY\*

**Abstract.** The concept of an emergent global civil society (GCS), an identifiable public sphere of voluntary association distinct from the architecture of states and markets, has become vogueish in some approaches to international relations and international political economy, and in the practices of global governance. This article seeks to reveal the limitations of the prevailing commonsense framing of GCS. Challenging the idea that we can isolate an unambiguous GCS sphere, we focus instead on the particular uses of GCS – on the practices that are shaped in its name. We make a number of interventions to emphasise the conceptual and political ambiguity of GCS. First, we shift the emphasis from GCS as a bounded ‘non-governmental’ space to GCS as precisely a means of making global politics governable in particular ways. Second, we question the assumption of GCS as ‘voluntary association’, asking what it means for GCS to embody or represent the interests of social groups. Finally, we raise questions of the image of empowerment through GCS, highlighting the power relations, tensions and contradictions at the heart of a transformative politics.

As a group of academics debating the conceptual and practical implications of global civil society (GCS), meeting in rural Wales in late summer 2001, we became acutely aware of the proximity (and also the disjuncture) of the relationship between our discussions and the ‘real’ world of global politics.<sup>1</sup> The date was September 11th and questions of power, responsibility, representation, and the inclusions and exclusions of GCS came tragically to the fore. It is these questions as to the constitutive effects of the discourse of GCS that we find somewhat neglected in the debate to date. The concept of an emergent GCS, an identifiable public sphere of voluntary association distinct from the architecture of states and markets, has become vogueish in some approaches to international relations (IR) and international political economy (IPE), and in the practices of global governance. It is the limitations imposed by such commonsense framings of GCS that we felt were partially responsible for our inability to find the means to begin to understand what happened on that day.

In this article, refuting the idea that we can isolate a clearly defined GCS sphere, we focus instead on the particular uses of the concept of GCS as it is deployed to legitimate and challenge the discourse and practice of global governance. Sensitive to what is done in the name of GCS, we are interested in the specific representation that has enabled neoliberal conceptions of global governance to flourish. Our

\* We wish to thank Mike Kenny, Randy Germain, Marieke de Goede, Matt Smith, an anonymous development NGO official, the participants in ‘Global Civil Society: Critical Engagements’, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments.

<sup>1</sup> Workshop on ‘Global Civil Society: Critical Engagements’, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, Gregynog, 10–12 September, 2001.

interest should not be read as an act of political closure. Rather, it is our intention to reopen areas of the GCS debate that we feel have been prematurely closed down. The policy prescriptions and commentaries of the principal international organisations have tended to treat GCS as a neutral category, populated in a pluralistic fashion by voluntary associations, thereby depoliticising its significance in governing the global political economy. By contrast, academic discussion in IR/IPE has tended to assert the transformative potential of GCS, particularly in terms of the capacity of groups to defy neoliberalism and democratise global governance. As the first part of this article shows, both positions tend to turn upon a particular representation of GCS. We characterise this by way of shorthand, thus: GCS as bounded space; GCS as voluntary associations; and GCS as agent of empowerment/resistance. In highlighting this representation, and whilst we are sympathetic to the normative concerns of many of our IR/IPE colleagues, it is our view that if we are to meaningfully open up the possibilities of GCS we must recognise the politics involved in the mapping out of what a GCS might look like. Both the discourse and the practices of GCS contain contradictions, that is they simultaneously exclude, control and discipline, as they also hold out the potential for resistance.

In the second part of the article, then, we make a number of interventions that seek to disrupt commonsense understandings of GCS. First, we shift the emphasis from GCS as a bounded 'non-governmental' and non-market domain to GCS as a means of making the global political economy governable in particular ways. We see the discussion of GCS as telling us something significant about contemporary efforts to manage and transform mechanisms of government. André Drainville's observations of 'the making of a compliant citizenry',<sup>2</sup> coupled with the Foucauldian-inspired governmentality literature, serve to challenge the delineation of civil society from state and market on which neoliberal global governance programmes rest. Second, we question the tendency to define GCS as a bounded, coherent sphere of agency. Most accounts of GCS seem overly tempted to list institutions and actors – trade unions, church groups, women's associations and so on – that are assumed to constitute a coherent force for 'good'. By contrast, we ask what it means for GCS to be 'representative' of particular interests. In our view, such institutional conceptions of GCS deny the unbounded, fluid and mobile character of the everyday struggles that a politicised reading of GCS would need to acknowledge. Finally, we raise questions of the image of empowerment through GCS that has accompanied the global governance debates. Following a diverse literature that warns of the 'inequality and domination' that has been 'built into the concept of "civil society" from the start',<sup>3</sup> we are concerned with the exclusions and oppressions 'inscribed in civil society'.<sup>4</sup> In sum, our intervention does not lead us to reject the potential for a transformative GCS that our IR/IPE colleagues are apt to identify. Rather, we see the power relations that find expression in the governing of the global political economy, and the tensions and contradictions of an emergent GCS (and not the consensus and interdependencies), to be central to the politics of transformation.

<sup>2</sup> André Drainville, 'The Fetishism of Global Civil Society: Global Governance, Transnational Urbanism and Sustainable Capitalism in the World Economy', in M. P. Smith and L. E. Guarnizo (eds.), *Transnationalism from Below* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> John Keane, *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> John MacLean, 'Towards a Political Economy of Agency in Contemporary IR', in Martin Shaw (ed.), *Politics and Globalisation: Knowledge, Ethics and Agency* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 186.

## Reflections on the global civil society discourse

The key contextual assumption that underpins the GCS discourse is that we are witnessing, alongside economic globalisation and the end of the Cold War, the construction of 'a nascent global polity' that 'is already partly extant, yet remains mostly emergent'.<sup>5</sup> According to this view, it would appear that we have entered a process of 'becoming' in the global political economy. The international politics of sovereign states is held to be increasingly challenged in juridical and practical terms by the transnationalising and deterritorialised character of contemporary social relations.<sup>6</sup> Such restructuring has given rise to a range of concepts, often devised in relation to well-worn notions, that seek to characterise and bring meaning to change. Scholars in IR/IPE, for example, talk of a 'post-Westphalian' politics or a 'new medievalism'.<sup>7</sup> It is the concept of 'global governance' that has, however, become the most prominent in accounts and policy prescriptions of the decentred, multilayered and overlapping character of contemporary political authority.<sup>8</sup> State institutions increasingly engage in multilateral agreements (regional and international), and international organisations such as the G-7, OECD, World Bank, IMF and WTO take on an expanded importance. Meanwhile, a wide array of 'private' institutions including industrial and financial associations and professional 'experts' such as accountants, consultants and economists also come to exercise significant authority.<sup>9</sup> With such proclaimed global governance has come a sharp growth in the activities of so-called non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that include the likes of Oxfam, Save the Children and the Red Crescent. While forging close working relationships with international organisations to, for example, run the refugee camps and design and carry out development projects, NGOs and broader social movements have also mobilised in an attempt to shape international policies and challenge the social relations of the *status quo*.<sup>10</sup> It is this enormously diverse array of NGOs and social movements that tends to be the focus in a discourse of GCS that has become ubiquitous in the discussions and practices of global governance.

While we are sympathetic to the desire to map the contours of this global transformation, we are concerned to acknowledge that the ways in which we understand,

<sup>5</sup> Richard Falk, 'Global Civil Society: Perspectives, Initiatives, Movements', *Oxford Development Studies*, 26:1 (1998), p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 132–58.

<sup>7</sup> See Mark Zacher, 'The Decaying of the Westphalian Temple: Implications for International Order and Governance', in James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel (eds.) *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 58–101; Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 153–5; Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 264–76.

<sup>8</sup> For an exhaustive and provocative review of global governance debates, see Craig Murphy, 'Global Governance: Poorly Done and Poorly Understood', *International Affairs*, 76: 4 (2000), pp. 789–803.

<sup>9</sup> See A. Claire Cutler, Virginia Haufler and Tony Porter (eds.) *Private Authority and International Affairs* (New York: SUNY, 1999); Martin Hewson and Timothy Sinclair, 'The Emergence of Global Governance Theory', in Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair (eds.), *Approaches to Global Governance Theory* (New York: SUNY, 1999), pp. 1–25.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Robert O'Brien, Anne-Marie Goetz, Jan Aart Scholte, and Mark Williams, *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

frame and discuss GCS shape what it will or can become. Our purpose would contrast with that of Colás, for example, for whom the importance of the concept of 'civil society' lies in its explanatory utility, 'the most adequate way of exploring the role of collective agency in international relations'.<sup>11</sup> Grounded in an awareness of the constitutive effects of the meanings ascribed to GCS, then, we are interested in the ways in which the inseparable normative and descriptive aspects of the GCS discourse impinge upon our collective capacity to understand and challenge the contemporary global political economy.

### *GCS as bounded space*

Representatives of international organisations and academic commentators on world order tend to share the ideal-typical representation of GCS as an identifiable space, sphere, realm or 'third system',<sup>12</sup> bounded by and differentiated from states and governance on the one hand and economy on the other. As a consequence, GCS takes on a non-economic and, especially significant for us, a non-governmental set of characteristics.

In a statement that is representative of the discursive practices of the international organisations, the World Bank describes civil society as 'the arena in which people come together to pursue the interests they hold in common – not for profit or the exercise of political power, but because they care enough about something to take collective action'.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile many in the academic community share a very similar spatial assumption. For instance, the first of Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor's three propositions for the study of GCS is that 'What we can observe in the 1990s is the emergence of a supranational sphere of social and political participation'.<sup>14</sup> Not only is this sphere distinct from the practices of governance and economy, but they depict it as existing 'above and beyond national, regional, or local societies'. Falk concurs, casting GCS as a 'field of action' that provides 'an alternative ideological and political space to that currently occupied by market-orientated and statist outlooks'.<sup>15</sup> It is this vision of GCS as a 'solidarity sphere'<sup>16</sup>, and its associated normative undertones of progressive transformation through collective association that, by and large, distinguishes academic commentaries from those of the international organisations. As activists in Asia, Latin America and particularly Eastern Europe recognised during the 1970s and 1980s, 'the ideal of societal space, autonomous from the state, wherein self-management and democracy could be worked out'<sup>17</sup> is of considerable utility to those seeking social transformation.

<sup>11</sup> Alejandro Colás, *International Civil Society: Social Movements in World Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 13–14.

<sup>12</sup> Falk, 'Global Civil Society', p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank, *Consultations with Civil Society Organizations: General Guidelines for World Bank Staff* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, and Mary Kaldor, 'Introducing Global Civil Society', in Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor (eds.) *Global Civil Society 2001* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Falk, 'Global Civil Society', p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'The Paradoxes of Civil Society', *International Sociology*, 12: 2 (1997), pp. 115–33.

<sup>17</sup> Gideon Baker, 'The Taming of the Idea of Civil Society', *Democratization*, 6: 3 (1999), pp. 1–29.

The representation of GCS as a bounded space filled with particular non-governmental and non-economic characteristics draws in large part on the long history of theories of civil society. Given the undoubted influence of neoliberal economics and the ideals of liberal democracy in the contemporary global political economy, it is not surprising that liberal conceptions of civil society have also once again proved powerful.<sup>18</sup> International organisations such as the World Bank have been very much at the heart of propagating the neoliberal Washington consensus. Spatial metaphors were strong in the early liberal vision of civil society associated with Smith and Hegel, a realm for the pursuit of particular interests that could be distinguished from the universality embodied by the state. Later the divorce of a liberal civil society of collective associations from the private sphere became central to the development of capitalism and modernity.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, the Gramscian conception of civil society has proved especially influential, both explicitly and implicitly, amongst activists and academics of GCS. For Gramsci, civil society was distinct from the economic base and distinguishable from the state, characterised as 'the realm in which the existing social order is grounded' and in which resides 'the combination of forces upon which the support for a new state and a new order can be built'.<sup>20</sup> That alternative theories of civil society tend to inform the different views of international organisations and the academic community has, however, done little to raise question-marks over the portrayal of GCS as bounded space.

The use of spatial metaphors to discern the contours of GCS is clearly not as unproblematic as common sense would suggest. As Hegel and those writing in the tradition of historical materialism would wish to remind us, the construction of GCS as a bounded sphere obscures the extent to which civil society, economy and state (and other institutions of governance) are necessarily intertwined and mutually constituting.<sup>21</sup> As Keane is at pains to stress, GCS is in many ways 'overdetermined' by wider sets of forces.<sup>22</sup> The state and other institutions of governance in particular provide the political and legal framework that institutionalises civil society's normative prerequisites. As such it is the broadly liberal form taken by state-societies, so central to modern political economy, that by advancing and protecting basic rights has historically filled European civil society with much of its meaning. Put another way and in the terms of the great traditions of civil society, 'liberalism cannot work without republicanism, the public remaking of the private'.<sup>23</sup> In turn, civil associations typically focus on the state to achieve change or resist state policies

<sup>18</sup> Hakan Seckinelgin, 'Civil Society as a Metaphor for Western Liberalism'. Civil Society working paper 21, Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics, January 2002 <[www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/ccs/pdf/CSWP21.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/ccs/pdf/CSWP21.pdf)>

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Robert W. Cox, 'Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium: Prospects for an Alternative World Order', *Review of International Studies*, 25: 1 (1999), pp. 3–28.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Neera Chandhoke, 'The "Civil" and the "Political" in Civil Society', *Democratization*, 8: 2 (2001), pp. 1–24; Stephen Hopgood, 'Reading the Small Print in Global Civil Society: The Inexorable Hegemony of the Liberal Self', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29: 1 (2000), pp. 1–25; Mustapha Kamal Pasha and David L. Blaney, 'Elusive Paradise: The Promise and Peril of Global Civil Society', *Alternatives*, 23:3 (1998), pp. 417–50.

<sup>22</sup> John Keane, 'Global Civil Society?', in Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor (eds.), *Global Civil Society 2001* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Hopgood, 'Reading the Small Print', p. 2.



that violate rights.<sup>24</sup> This is expressed in the work of scholars such as Murphy and Colás who, stressing the historical inseparability of state and civil society, reject the ‘global’ signifier in favour of the category of ‘international civil society’.<sup>25</sup> Bracketing out contemporary GCS as a bounded sphere may obscure, then, the need to consider the practices of GCS in close relation to economic change, and the restructuring of states as part of shifting configurations of governance. It follows that GCS cannot simply be characterised as containing a particular ‘logic’ of more or less transformative collective association, differentiated from the ‘logic’ of government and authority on the one hand and that of economy on the other. As Chandhoke has it, ‘we can suggest with some justification that the much-vaunted autonomy of civil society is constrained from the word go’.<sup>26</sup>

### *GCS as voluntary associations*

The second tenet of the GCS discourse upon which we would like to reflect is the tendency to equate GCS with the practices of voluntary associations. In short, GCS becomes defined as voluntary association and *vice versa*. Descriptions of GCS in both the documentation of the international organisations and scholarly work often read like a ‘who’s who’ of NGOs and social movements, such that GCS becomes equivalent to what Pasha and Blaney call ‘transnational associational life’.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the associational life of GCS also becomes privileged in normative terms. Voluntary associations in the space of GCS are viewed either as *the* legitimate form of politics through which to bring improved accountability to the institutions of global governance, or as *the* principal form of a progressive politics capable of challenging and transforming the *status quo*. What concerns us, then, is the delimiting consequences for politics of framing GCS as voluntary associations.

The common sense that equates GCS with voluntary associations is so omnipresent in the discourse that a couple of illustrative quotations should suffice. For instance, for the Commission on Global Governance, the term GCS

... covers a multitude of institutions, voluntary associations and networks – women’s groups, trade unions, chambers of commerce, farming or housing co-operatives, neighbourhood watch associations, religion-based organizations, and so on.<sup>28</sup>

Such is the extent of the identification of GCS with voluntary organisations for the World Bank that they consistently refer to what they call ‘civil society organisations’.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, despite developing a more critical approach to GCS, leading IR/IPE scholar of GCS Jan Aart Scholte engages in a not-dissimilar list-making exercise that suggests that:

<sup>24</sup> Pasha and Blaney, ‘Elusive Paradise’, p. 421.

<sup>25</sup> Craig N. Murphy, *International Organisation and Industrial Change: Global Governance Since 1850* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Colás, *International Civil Society*.

<sup>26</sup> Chandhoke, ‘The “Civil” and the “Political”’, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Pasha and Blaney, ‘Elusive Paradise’, p. 419.

<sup>28</sup> Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> World Bank, ‘Consultations with Civil Society’.

we can take 'civil society' to refer to those activities by voluntary associations to shape policies, norms and/or deeper social structures. Civil society is therefore distinct from both official and commercial circles ... civil society groups include academic institutes, community-based organisations, consumer protection bodies, criminal syndicates, development cooperation groups, environmental campaigns, ethnic lobbies, charitable foundations, farmers' groups, human rights advocates, labour unions, relief organisations, peace activists, professional bodies, religious institutions, women's networks, youth campaigns and more.<sup>30</sup>

As is the case with the tendency to represent GCS as a bounded space, the image of GCS as voluntary associations is not simply a consequence of attempts to merely describe changes in the global political economy. Rather, it is, at least in part, a reflection of the influence of particular theories of civil society in framing contemporary conceptions. The ideas expressed in the nineteenth century by Alexis de Tocqueville on the workings of American democracy clearly loom large. For the international organisations in particular, de Tocqueville's conclusions as to the centrality of voluntary associations to a healthy liberal democracy are by and large transposed to the present in their policy prescriptions. This is as apparent, for instance, in the World Bank's recommendations that assert the centrality of the 'social capital' supplied by civil society to economic development,<sup>31</sup> as it is in the WTO's efforts to welcome the lobbying of NGOs.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the intellectual currents of thought that frame many academic accounts of GCS also encourage the representation of GCS as voluntary associations. It is far from coincidental that academic interest in GCS has overlapped with a period of constructive critical engagement with Marxism across the social sciences.<sup>33</sup> The resulting neo-Marxism is apt to stress that 'the politics of civil society, articulated primarily through new social movements, has superseded the politics of class'.<sup>34</sup> Civil society is no longer viewed simply as synonymous with bourgeois capitalism,<sup>35</sup> but is necessary to either bring capitalism under democratic control or to find a more democratic means of economic organisation.<sup>36</sup> The writings of Gramsci who, contrary to Marx, was never willing to equate civil society with the bourgeoisie and instead chose to emphasise a wide range of collective associations, have once again proved especially influential in this regard.

It is important to reinforce that for both the international organisations and academic commentators, GCS as voluntary associations is regarded as a force for

<sup>30</sup> Scholte, *Globalization*, p. 277.

<sup>31</sup> For detailed arguments that assert the importance of liberal civil society in supplying the collective cultural underpinnings for a successful market economy, see Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), and Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Rorden Wilkinson, 'Global Monitor: The World Trade Organization', *New Political Economy*, 7: 1 (2002), p. 131–4.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Alain Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles: The Crisis of Global Fordism* (London: Verso, 1987); Robert W. Cox Production, *Power and World Order: Social Forces and the Making of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

<sup>34</sup> George Lafferty, 'The Dynamics of Change: Class, Politics and Civil Society – From Marx to post-Marxism', *Democracy and Nature*, 6: 1 (2000), p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> See Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society*; Ellen Meiskins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>36</sup> Viren Murthy, 'Leftist Mourning: Civil Society and Political Practice in Hegel and Marx', *Rethinking Marxism*, 11: 3 (1999), pp. 36–55.



good. While understanding the utility of a well-developed civil society to the international organisations is fairly obvious given their neoliberal credentials and prescriptions, we have to turn to debates about the continuing relevance of Marxist thought to understand the celebration of the virtues of GCS in academic circles. Just as the proletariat is juxtaposed to the bourgeoisie under Marxism, many scholars of GCS position the 'good' of civil society against the 'bad' of state and capital.<sup>37</sup> Such is this trait in the discourse, also influenced by the experience of activists during the 1980s in Eastern Europe, that GCS as voluntary association is enclosed further. For many of the leading IR/IPE scholars, GCS no longer refers to the bourgeoisie or even includes chambers of commerce and other associations of capital.<sup>38</sup> Rather, the space of GCS is an exclusive one, occupied by the associations and movements of labour, women, environmentalists and other 'good' causes. As Cox claims, 'The concept has been appropriated by those who foresee an emancipatory role for civil society'.<sup>39</sup>

There is, then, a strong contested normative dimension to GCS as voluntary associations. The politics of world order is effectively fixed, with the associations of civil society privileged in different ways from both the 'top-down' and from the 'bottom-up'.<sup>40</sup> From what is described as the 'top-down', the voluntary associations of GCS form the focal point upon which turns *the* vision of a global polity painted and practised by the international organisations.<sup>41</sup> Voluntary associations here are in many ways the signature of a civility that is brought to bear in global politics, resting upon the principles of rights, plurality, legality, autonomy and freedom of association. Echoes of the liberal tradition of civil society are clear. The manner in which GCS as voluntary associations comes at once to legitimate and delegitimate different forms of politics in the contemporary global political economy is beginning to be recognised. For instance, for Pasha and Blaney the 'notions of civility that are increasingly attached to civil society, while enabling a certain form of civil life, also contribute to a narrowing of the political agenda and the exclusion of certain actors and voices'.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, for Drainville, 'politics takes on the appearance of a collection of managerial problems to be solved and where the broad political attempt to settle a new order goes unexamined'.<sup>43</sup> What has been less well recognised to date is that by advocating the centrality of the 'good' voluntary associations of GCS as *the* key agent for transformation, the so-called 'bottom-up' vision of a progressive global politics also has delimiting consequences. The coherence of 'good' voluntary associations is assumed and the actual and potential importance of other forms of political practice are at best obscured, and at worst devalued. For instance, social movements can be seen to have "'dual faces" which dialectically combine instrumental . . . demands with an expressive dimension orientated towards norms, values, identities, lifestyles, etc.'. <sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Keane, 'Global Civil Society?', p. 30.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Falk, 'Global Civil Society'; Cox, 'Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium'; Scholte, *Globalization*.

<sup>39</sup> Cox, 'Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium', p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Drainville, 'The Fetishism of Global Civil Society', p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Pasha and Blaney, 'Elusive Paradise', p. 423.

<sup>43</sup> Drainville, 'The Fetishism of Global Civil Society', p. 54.

<sup>44</sup> Neil Stammers, 'Social Movements and the Challenge to Power', in Martin Shaw (ed.), *Politics and Globalisation: Knowledge, Ethics and Agency* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 79.

The privileging of GCS as a space of voluntary associations risks overvaluing instrumental political practices to the overall detriment of the progressive politics of transformation.

*GCS as agent of empowerment/resistance*

For both its top-down and bottom-up proponents, the medley of voluntary movements and organisations in GCS are, taken together, imagined as ‘an autonomous and unambiguous agent’.<sup>45</sup> The autonomy of GCS rests upon the bounding of a space of voluntary associations from states and other institutions of governance on the one hand, and economy on the other. For Kaldor, for example, the defining feature of ‘21st century’ civil society is its ‘transnational autonomy’ from the war-making capabilities of the state.<sup>46</sup> The unambiguous qualities of GCS arise from the tendency, present in both the documents of international organisations and the writings of academic commentators, to represent the voluntary associations of GCS as a force for good. Here we reflect in detail, then, on the tenet of the discourse which suggests that GCS constitutes a ‘good’ agent for either empowerment or resistance. We are, in particular, concerned that GCS as agent of empowerment/resistance overplays the consensual and coherent characteristics of GCS to the neglect of power relations, contradictions and tensions.

GCS constitutes an agent for empowerment in a dual sense, enabling the political participation of GCS whilst authorising and legitimating the practices of the formal institutions of global governance. Perhaps not surprisingly, international organisations themselves are keen to invoke the assumed empowerment qualities of GCS. For example, the 1996 WTO *Guidelines for arrangements on relations with NGOs* clearly states that ‘Members recognize the role NGOs can play to increase the awareness of the public in respect of WTO activities and agree in this regard to improve transparency and develop communication with NGOs’.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, the UN’s actions under the so-called Global Compact have sought to encourage corporate social and environmental self-regulatory ‘good practice’ through a process of partnerships that includes major NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund, Amnesty International and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.<sup>48</sup> As the representatives of international organisations appear well aware, a nascent global polity necessarily entails not only the erosion of state sovereignty but also challenges the efficacy of liberal democracy.<sup>49</sup> They have effectively come to confront a set of questions reminiscent of those asked by Machiavelli back in the sixteenth century – that is, how to forge the social basis necessary for new forms of political authority.

<sup>45</sup> Pasha and Blaney, ‘Elusive Paradise’, p. 425.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), p. 143.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Wilkinson, ‘Global Monitor’, p. 133.

<sup>48</sup> See John Gerard Ruggie, ‘global\_governance.net: The Global Compact as Learning Network’, *Global Governance*, 7: 4 (2001), pp. 371–8.

<sup>49</sup> See David Held and Anthony McGrew, ‘Globalization and the Liberal Democratic State’, *Government and Opposition*, 28 (1993), pp. 261–85.

The conclusion that the voluntary associations of GCS, and not Machiavelli's Prince, should play the key role in empowerment has, however, not only been reached by the international organisations. While often critical of the unaccountability of the institutions of global governance, many in the academic community have also asserted the centrality of GCS to the making of a democratic global polity. The international campaigns and lobbying of an NGO like Greenpeace come to be seen as the exemplar of the democratising potential of GCS.<sup>50</sup> In the first instance the key task for the agent of GCS is 'about increasing the responsiveness of political institutions . . . the need to influence and put pressure on global institutions in order to reclaim control over local political space'.<sup>51</sup> As Scholte notes:

civil society activities can contribute to a democratic legitimization of the governance of globalization. Authority is legitimate when stakeholders feel that governors have a right to govern over them and that they, as citizens, have a duty to submit to the established rules. There has been limited legitimacy in the governance of globalization to date. Most people have accepted most policies towards global relations with passivity, ignorance and resignation. Yet if civil society offers stakeholders civic education, opportunities to speak, and chances to debate options, then people can begin to feel that they 'own' global politics and positively endorse its outputs. Such legitimacy not only renders governance more democratic; it also tends to make policies more viable.<sup>52</sup>

For many academic commentators, the capacity of GCS to successfully and meaningfully empower the institutions of global governance requires that new forms of democratic participation are put in place. To return to Anheier *et al.*, GCS is also 'about the radicalisation of democracy and the redistribution of political power'.<sup>53</sup> Richard Falk talks, for instance, of the need to construct what he terms 'normative democracy'. With clear parallels to David Held's work, Falk conceives of democracy 'as extending beyond constitutional and free, periodic elections to include an array of other assurances that governance is orientated toward human wellbeing and ecological sustainability, and that citizens have access to arenas of decision'.<sup>54</sup>

It can be seen, then, that implicit in much of the academic advocacy of GCS is the belief that by acting as a progressive force for 'good', GCS provides the key to resistance in the contemporary world order. While for the likes of Richard Falk this resistance hinges upon the establishment of more participatory and substantive democratic arrangements, others expect GCS to take the lead in a wider and perhaps ultimately more emancipatory transformation. In the Gramscian terms of many of these writers, civil society's organic intellectuals, including academics, church leaders, trade unionists, environmentalists, social activists and leaders of community organisations, are enacting a so-called counter-hegemonic war of position to establish a 'higher form of society'.<sup>55</sup> Whilst uncertain and far from determined, the qualities of such a society seem likely to combine equitable and environmentally sustainable economic provisioning with a republican vision of democracy.

<sup>50</sup> Falk, 'Global Civil Society', p. 104–5.

<sup>51</sup> Anheier *et al.*, 'Introducing Global Civil Society', p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Scholte, *Globalization*, p. 278.

<sup>53</sup> Anheier *et al.*, 'Introducing Global Civil Society', p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> Falk, 'Global Civil Society', p. 106–7. See also David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

<sup>55</sup> Cox, 'Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium', p. 16.

For us, however, the representation of GCS as the 'good' agent for empowerment/resistance remains highly problematic. Our concerns go beyond the observations of advocates of GCS that achievements have been 'piecemeal' and 'disparate' to date,<sup>56</sup> or that in the emancipatory sense GCS remains 'something to be achieved'.<sup>57</sup> Rather, we would seek to raise questions as to the coherent and consensual features of GCS that, as a prerequisite for empowerment/resistance, tend to be assumed. For us, civil society is constituted as much by the highly differentiated politics of power as it is by the politics of empowerment and protest. Inequalities and conflicts abound. For instance, we should recognise that the overtly neoliberal vision of GCS propagated by the international organisations 'is established after the image of the civilised (European) male individual' and 'rests on a foundation of excluded women, who are expected to live under conditions of household despotism'.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, the capacity of the voluntary associations of GCS to empower the formal institutions of global governance itself requires the prior provision and protection of basic rights of association that remain far from universal or pluralist. By way of example, Anheier *et al.* draw our attention to fault lines in GCS between those that support or wish to reform, reject or find alternatives to globalisation.<sup>59</sup> The liberal constitution of GCS, as currently practised by the international organisations, structurally privileges supporters of globalisation and, at best, those NGOs seeking reform.

Serious doubts also remain as to the representation of GCS as a 'good' agent for resistance. As already noted, the 'good' character of GCS is initially established by banishing the associations of capital from the space of civil society, such that GCS becomes 'something like a world proletariat in civvies'.<sup>60</sup> This contrasts with the current situation in which the engagement between international organisations and voluntary associations is by and large dominated by capital.<sup>61</sup> Even if we can accept that the associations of capital are not part of an emancipatory GCS, questions still remain as to the assumed consensus amongst labour, environmentalists, women's groups and so on. This 'good' consensus, perceived to reflect a common opposition to neoliberalism, is far from assured. As Cox admits, a lack of consensus could leave the way clear for what he calls the 'dark forces' of the extreme right, terrorists, organised crime and the intelligence services to enjoy further 'covert power'.<sup>62</sup> In sum, we would contend that the representation of GCS as actual and potential agent of resistance may actually divert our attention from the very power relations that we would seek to explore and question.

## Global civil society reconsidered

In the first section of this article we have explored what we consider to be the dominant mode of knowledge in the contemporary framing of GCS. By positioning

<sup>56</sup> Falk, 'Global Civil Society', p. 105–6.

<sup>57</sup> Cox, 'Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium', p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Keane, *Civil Society and the State*, p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> Anheier *et al.*, 'Introducing Global Civil Society', p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Keane, 'Global Civil Society?', p. 29.

<sup>61</sup> O'Brien *et al.*, *Contesting Global Governance*.

<sup>62</sup> Cox, 'Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium', p. 13–15.

GCS as a non-governmental and non-market domain, constituted through voluntary association and resulting in an empowering and progressive force for good, this representation tells us 'what GCS is' and, importantly, what it is not. Given IR/IPE's predilection for identifiable and bounded agents within clearly defined structures of power, the more subtle and contradictory voices and actions of other groups have often become obscured.<sup>63</sup> Our purpose in this section is to begin to draw together from diverse sources an alternative framing of GCS. The different strands of inquiry explored here have in common an emphasis on power and, specifically, on the intricate and intractable relationship between power and knowledge. Our knowledge of what GCS may constitute is understood to be inseparable from the power that is exercised through the framing of, for example, mechanisms of global governance. To think differently about the existence of a GCS, then, is to open up the possibility for alternative forms of politics. Drawing on a number of concrete examples of what we may call civil society practices, we intend to show that such alternative forms of politics are, indeed, already present, though obscured from view by the search for a particular kind of responsible and 'civil' global agency.

*From a non-governmental space to a means of governing*

The orthodox understanding of GCS, as we have suggested in this article, embodies a particular view of what it means 'to govern' and 'to be governed'. Government is a function that is held to rest with formal institutions – governments, international organisations and so on. James Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel's established argument that world affairs have shifted from a system of government to governance retains the notion that to govern is to provide the institutionalised norms and frameworks for action.<sup>64</sup> A GCS, then, is necessary to provide accountability in a system of global governance. As a so-called third sphere of non-governmental politics, GCS is celebrated because it is seen as outside government. We wish to bring our concern with power relations to front and centre by reconsidering GCS as precisely a site of government – as a place where the global political economy is shaped, regulated or deregulated, disciplined or sustained. In this alternative framing of GCS as a discursive means of governing, of making people and their actions governable, we find the potential to challenge ascribed boundaries of state/civil society and public/private, and to highlight the ambiguities of GCS. If we are to meaningfully open up the possibilities of a transformative GCS we must recognise that it simultaneously holds out the potential for resistance, while it closes down, excludes, controls and disciplines.

Michel Foucault's writing offers us a conception of government and governability that refutes conventionally held dichotomising assumptions about state and civil society. Governmentality, as he termed it, is 'the ensemble formed by the institutions,

<sup>63</sup> See Roger Tooze and Craig Murphy, 'Poverty of Epistemology in IPE: Mystery, Blindness, and Invisibility', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 25:3 (1996), pp. 681–707; Craig Murphy, 'Seeing Women, Recognising Gender, Recasting International Relations', *International Organization*, 50:3 (1996), pp. 513–538.

<sup>64</sup> James Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel, *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in*

procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population'.<sup>65</sup> The act of government, then, is not something undertaken by institutions and individuals holding power over society. Rather, governmentality permits government from a distance, just as the global governance doctrines prescribe. Commenting on the relevance of Foucault's work to what he calls 'neoliberal subjects', Nikolas Rose depicts the kind of government that can exist through the mentalities of individuals and groups:

An enabling state that will govern without governing 'society' – governing by acting on the choices and self-steering properties of individuals, families, communities, organizations. This entails a twin process of autonomization plus responsabilization – opening free space for the choices of individual actors whilst enwrapping these autonomized actors within new forms of control.<sup>66</sup>

The implications of the governmentality thesis for the contemporary discourse of GCS are, in our view, of great significance. For instance, in his Foucauldian study of civil society associations in the UK, John Morison uncovers a 'new breed of professionalized, well-funded, and well-organized voluntary associations' who 'use the language of risk and reward, choice, economic rationality, targeting and output as the governing concepts'.<sup>67</sup> Focusing similar attention on transnational civil society, André Drainville points to the 'double attempt to construct global civil society and settle with it the terms of transnational civility'.<sup>68</sup> Exploring what he terms 'transnational subjects' through the Quebec City protests of 2001, he understands the twinning of heads of states' Summits and People's Summits as an 'attempt to create a responsible hemispheric civil society' within which resistance becomes compliance.<sup>69</sup> Under orthodox neoliberal conceptions of GCS as a bounded non-governmental public space, most personal questions of how one should live and who one should aspire to be are deemed to be private and are effectively depoliticised. The governmentality lens on GCS has the effect of repoliticising private individual ambitions, perceptions and experiences as these are brought into networks of power. The membership of an environmental group, for example, becomes tied to the citizen as a responsible consumer and draws on numerous lifestyle habits and choices – from fair-trade cappuccinos to 'anti-sweatshop' T-shirts.

The practices of global civil society, it seems to us, cannot be decisively situated in a bounded space that is 'non-governmental' and 'non-economic'. In the World Bank's framing of civil society, for example, local networks and voluntary associations become a means to mitigate the more damaging forces of the global economy. Under the heading 'what is civil society?', their website represents voluntary associations as sources of social capital that can, alongside state and market,

*World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>65</sup> Michel Foucault, 'On Governmentality', *Ideology and Consciousness*, 6 (1979), p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Free Association Books, 1999 [1989]), p. xxiii.

<sup>67</sup> John Morison, 'The Government-Voluntary Sector Compacts: Governance, Governmentality, and Civil Society', *Journal of Law and Society*, 27:1 (2000), p. 109.

<sup>68</sup> Drainville, 'The Fetishism of Global Civil Society', p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> Andre Drainville, 'Quebec City 2001 and the Making of Transnational Subjects', *Socialist Register* (2002), p. 27.



'contribute jointly to the provision of welfare and economic development'.<sup>70</sup> Offering the examples of local credit networks and rural organisations, the concept of civil society is tied to the responsibilities of individuals and groups to take 'the opportunity to participate' in development and social welfare. In the World Development Report *Attacking Poverty*, the Bank makes its use of GCS as a means of governing more explicit. In their guidelines on 'helping poor people to manage risk' they describe microfinance as a 'risk management tool' that can 'help poor households smooth consumption during an adverse shock'.<sup>71</sup> Though the report refers to NGOs such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), HomeNet, and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), the participation of these groups is understood to be the responsible and proactive obligation of global citizens. The critical voices that these groups bring to the inequalities of the global economy are masked by a discourse of 'harnessing global forces' and providing channels for legitimate participation that enable poor people to 'get the best' from globalisation.

We are not suggesting that GCS is simply synonymous with the governing of the latest (neoliberal, global) stage of bourgeois capitalism, far from it. Rather, spaces of GCS should be treated as ambiguous, open to contestation and often contradictory. The roles of civil society groups in relation to the governance of the global political economy are, more often than not, undecidable. Organisations may simultaneously appear to offer coping mechanisms for dealing with globalisation (in effect, plugging the gaps left by the global economy), while also offering a substantive critique of the structures of global finance and production. Indeed, NGOs may themselves debate and negotiate the terms of their role in advocacy networks and partnerships, acknowledging the tensions and contradictions in their own activities to such an extent that their intra-institutional organisation divorces their role in service-delivery from their advocacy work.<sup>72</sup> A further example can be found in local exchange trading systems (LETS). On the one hand, LETS are widely understood to be voluntary associations that have emerged as a response to the exclusionary consequences of financial globalisation.<sup>73</sup> Yet, on the other hand, their relationship to the politics of global financial exclusion is thoroughly ambiguous. In one sense, they are 'self help' associations that also campaign for change in global finance. In another sense, the practices of LETS appeal to criteria of trust and responsibility that are not dissimilar from those applied to individuals by mainstream financial institutions. While we agree that LETS are interesting and potentially transformative sites within specific locales, we also emphasise their ambivalence – they cannot be isolated from state, market, or the existing exclusions of mainstream finance. For us, the contested and contradictory making of neoliberal or transnational subjectivities, furthered by the global governance discourse, is part of a wider network of production, consumption and familial practices that criss-cross ascribed public and private domains.

<sup>70</sup> See <[www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital](http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital)>

<sup>71</sup> World Bank, 'Attacking Poverty', *World Development Report* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000/01), p. 156.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with development NGO official, July 2002.

<sup>73</sup> Eric Helleiner, 'Think Globally, Transact Locally: Green Political Economy and the Local Currency Movement', paper presented at the 39th International Studies Association Annual Convention, February 1998, Washington DC; M. Pacione, 'Local Exchange Trading Systems as a Response to the Globalisation of Capitalism', *Urban Studies*, 34: 8 (1997), pp. 1179–99.

*From fixed agency to the politics of movement*

'Terms like "international civil society"', writes Arjun Appadurai, 'do not entirely capture the mobility and malleability of those creative forms of social life that are localized transit points for mobile global forms of civic and civil life'.<sup>74</sup> As a concept used to explain the emergent character of contemporary global politics, GCS has done much to transcend the state-centred preoccupations of much IR and IPE. Yet, many of the habits of traditional IR/IPE inquiry remain in place: the tendency to look for identifiable and atomised agents, a focus on institutions as fixed structures of political life, and the separation of levels of analysis as though these were actually clearly delineated in everyday life. In some senses the concept of a GCS always appears in relation to a sovereign state or international organisation,<sup>75</sup> a named list of institutions with clear membership constituencies, and a spectrum of activity from 'transnational' to 'grassroots'. For Rob Walker, 'social movements are, to the modern political imagination, most easily fixed within a sphere of social life that is distinguished from and even counterposed to the sphere of politics – within the so-called civil society'.<sup>76</sup> Taken together with Appadurai's observations, this suggests not that we take our eyes off civil society movements or necessarily deny the potential of a transformative GCS, but that we think of them as unbounded, fluid, and mobile political sites. In contrast to fixed and named associations, we then see a sphere of social life whose boundaries and membership are contested. Rather than an elite world of policymaking that is counterposed to local and grassroots struggle, we see what Walker terms 'the transgression of these fine lines'.<sup>77</sup> The politics of movements thus shifts from the identification of a fixed association or NGO to an acknowledgement of the ability to confound boundaries that is their very essence.

It is not unusual for an institution or organisation to claim to be speaking on behalf of, or with the mandate of, GCS. To explore an example, there is increasing interest in the idea that organised labour may be, in the broadest sense, representative of the interests of civil society. Juan Somavia, Director General of the ILO, considers organised labour to be an institution of GCS, with transnational unions being 'the most organised actors and the most articulate voices in society'.<sup>78</sup> It is held that the challenges posed to labour by globalisation and the restructuring of production are shared by civil society more widely, and that the trade unions represent the most effective channel for communicating those interests. Put simply, effective politics is understood to reside with formalised associations that have a clear mandate. Alliances between trade unions and NGOs have been celebrated by a literature that documents the rise of a 'global social movement unionism' that

<sup>74</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination', in Appadurai (ed.), *Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>75</sup> O'Brien et al., *Contesting Global Governance*, for example, assess the significance of new social movements in world politics in terms of their ability to influence the agendas of international financial institutions.

<sup>76</sup> R.B.J Walker, 'Social Movements/World Politics', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 23:3 (1994), p. 670.

<sup>77</sup> R.B.J Walker, 'Social Movements/World Politics', p. 700.

<sup>78</sup> Juan Somavia, 'Trade Unions in the 21st Century', Keynote Speech (Geneva: ILO, 1999).

transcends the narrow concerns of organised labour.<sup>79</sup> This tendency to name associations or movements as vehicles for GCS serves to fix the politics of work and labour as something that is the preserve of trade unions and NGOs. The experiences of unprotected workers, or indeed the unemployed, are exposed only *via* intermediary agencies that claim to speak on their behalf.

If we reconsider the agency of workers and worker groups, focusing on the mobile and contested nature of movements, we can begin to problematise the idea that formalised trade unions speak on behalf of workers as a collective body. The contemporary politics of movement within and across workplaces is as much about 'involuntary' and unplanned 'reflex' action, what James Scott would call 'infra-politics',<sup>80</sup> as it is 'voluntary' and strategic action. Many of the struggles labelled 'grassroots', such as plant-level industrial action or everyday 'footdragging' and acts of disruption, are actually central to the politics of work and confound attempts to limit this to a global social movement unionism. Maria Soldatenko's studies of Latina garment workers in Los Angeles, for example, emphasise the intra-worker and inter-ethnic conflict within sweatshop conditions. This problematises the treatment of workers as a collective body and exposes the difficulties of trying to 'forge an effective culture of resistance'.<sup>81</sup> It is not to say that collective identities and resistances cannot emerge in such environments, but rather to highlight the shifts and political struggles that define the nature of the resistance. To illustrate further, in *Bread and Roses*, Ken Loach's cinematic portrayal of life as an undocumented Mexican cleaner in Los Angeles, Rosa voices her contempt for the American unions that claim to represent her interests. Supporting her family through prostitution and cleaning work, she asks her white, college-educated union representative, 'what do you risk?', challenging his 'justice for janitors' campaign with an appeal for 'justice for Rosa'. In response to the union's collective 'we', Rosa replies 'don't say we, there is never we, only I'.<sup>82</sup> Again, we do not suggest the impossibility of multiple 'I's' becoming 'we', and indeed Loach's film reveals this possibility. Rather, we wish both to expose the problem of ascribing 'responsible' and 'civil' identities to people by virtue of their exclusion, and to acknowledge the tensions and personal losses that accompany the making of solidarity.

When labour organisations claim to speak on behalf of a collective 'we' they avert their gaze, not only from the experiences of workers at the margins of the global political economy, but also from the 'silent resistances' that characterise the politics of displaced and excluded peoples.<sup>83</sup> Beneath the surface of an emergent GCS lie

<sup>79</sup> Robert O'Brien, 'Workers and World Order: The Tentative Transformation of the International Union Movement', *Review of International Studies*, 26:4 (2000), pp. 533–56; Peter Waterman and Jane Wills, 'Introduction: Space, Place and the New Labour Internationalisms: Beyond the Fragments', *Antipode*, 33:3 (2001), pp. 305–311.

<sup>80</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>81</sup> M. A. Soldatenko, 'Made in the USA: Latinas/os? Garment Work and Ethnic Conflict in Los Angeles' Sweat Shops', *Cultural Studies* 13: 2 (1999), p. 319.

<sup>82</sup> Filmfour, *Bread and Roses*, Ken Loach (2002).

<sup>83</sup> Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work: The Global Politics of Domestic Labour* (London: Zed, 2000); Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA.: South End Press, 2000); Fantu Cheru, 'The Silent Revolution and the Weapons of the Weak: Transformation and Innovation from Below', in Stephen Gill and James Mittelman (eds.), *Innovation and Transformation in International Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

multiple global civil societies with competing experiences of what it means to belong to a group or place, what it means to organise, and what it means to say 'we'.

*Uncovering the power in empowerment*

In most orthodox accounts of GCS as agent of empowerment, power is considered to be a commodity that is parcelled up, held by particular agents and groups, and wielded over the lives of others. 'The capacity to wield power as a resource over other agents', writes David Campbell, 'is an important proviso of agency'.<sup>84</sup> The voluntary associations assumed to populate a fledgling GCS, then, can be 'empowered', literally endowed with the power resources necessary to apply pressure for global transformation. The problem, of course, is that things are rarely so straightforward in the concrete practices of organisation and resistance. It is not possible to reduce power to a named group, institution or actor, as many seeking to map out a GCS would wish to do. Civil society groups or movements do not simply 'rise up' to challenge the power of global markets, they do not unambiguously resist because they are always also intricately involved in the very production of that power:

Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex strategic relationship in a particular society.<sup>85</sup>

Our attention is directed to the ways in which power functions and is exercised through civil society groups, and to the inequalities and exclusions that are produced. As collective agents, global civil society networks are themselves inscribed with the power relations found in the states, markets, and organisations they seek to challenge. We would agree, then, with John MacLean who reminds us that to reduce our search for transformative 'agency' to the identification of collective 'agents' leads to a misrepresentation of politics and power relations.<sup>86</sup> Trade unions, universities, the media, and church organisations are all historical sites of civil society uprising, but they are simultaneously spaces of representation, exclusion and control. The politics of GCS is, thus, running with contradictions, and constantly in flux – a movement that is not always in the direction of emancipatory 'civility'.

We wish to emphasise here three aspects of GCS that become visible if we cease the search for the consolidated agent for 'good' and recognise the agitative and contradictory nature of what it means to be 'civil'. First, within a named and assumed civil society grouping there are tensions surrounding 'who' is being empowered, or 'what' is being resisted. To deny these tensions in a search for a single galvanising manifesto or agenda is to miss the very heart of the politics of

<sup>84</sup> David Campbell, 'Political Prosaics, Transversal Politics, and the Anarchical World', in M. J. Shapiro and H. R. Alker (eds.), *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 11.

<sup>85</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I: *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1980), p. 93.

<sup>86</sup> MacLean, 'Towards a Political Economy of Agency'.

transformation. In his discussion of the popular dissent leading to the East German revolution, Roland Bleiker significantly problematises the image of a civil society movement that empowers its members and rewards their participation:

Despite their unusually active participation in the protest movement, East German women suffered disproportionately from the subsequent process of unification. For them the democratic dawn ushered in drastic setbacks in such realms as reproductive rights, access to day care or employment opportunities. A revived civil society, which identifies men with the public and women with the private sphere, further increased the masculinist character of post-Wall German politics.<sup>87</sup>

Participation in voluntary civil society activity cannot, in and of itself, be understood to empower and emancipate. 'Discursively entrenched power relations', Bleiker writes, 'cannot simply be toppled by mass demonstrations or other transversal practices of dissent'.<sup>88</sup> The ability to transgress political boundaries, to organise transnationally and even to achieve democratic transformation, does not necessarily and always challenge entrenched forms of domination and exclusion. It may even deepen them. As Pasha and Blaney have it, 'transnational associational life does not so readily transcend contemporary contradictions and oppressions'.<sup>89</sup> We are not suggesting that there is no potential for a transformative GCS sphere, but rather that it cannot be understood as unambiguously made by individual actors rationally pooling their interests to secure the optimal outcome. Despite the claims made about 'social capital', the political outcomes can never be clear-cut, and the objectives may never be fully met. As is exemplified particularly well by women's movements in former Communist Europe, the achievement of apparent success in political transformation can be built on the back of gendered practices that displace risks onto women and migrant workers. The terms of reference of a civil society movement for change cannot avoid dealing with the very exclusions it seeks to oppose, and may indeed carry them into an otherwise transformed order.

Second, the assumption of GCS as a cohesive and empowered agent masks the contradictions of people's feelings of shared experience, personal wellbeing and perceptions of risk and reward. Within existing conceptions of GCS, do we have ways of thinking about the individual who is a member of Amnesty International while simultaneously holding portfolio investments in a number of large multinational corporations; the alliance between the United Nations World Food Programme and Benetton's advertising campaigns; the Visa cardholder who joins Reclaim the Streets; or the report from the Seattle protests that asked: 'did the protester who was filmed kicking lumps off the Nike sign while wearing Nike shoes see the irony?'.<sup>90</sup> For it is in such contradictory relationships with the global political economy that we all find ourselves. Arjun Appadurai captures just such a contradiction when he asks how we can begin to understand the disjuncture of:

Ideas about gender and modernity that circulate to create large female workforces at the same time that cross-national ideologies of 'culture', 'authenticity', and national honour put

<sup>87</sup> Roland Bleiker, *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 34.

<sup>88</sup> Bleiker, *Popular Dissent*, p. 170.

<sup>89</sup> Pasha and Blaney, 'Elusive Paradise', p. 431.

<sup>90</sup> Larry Elliott, 'Unless WTO Cleans up its Act There Will be More Issues for the Protesters to Trade On', *The Guardian*, 6 December (1999).

increasing pressure on various communities to morally discipline just those working women who are vital to emerging markets and manufacturing sites.<sup>91</sup>

It is these 'dark sides' of civil society activity that are so often invisible within discourses of empowerment/resistance in global governance. Just as some movements organise to challenge the boundaries that confine and restrict the movement of people, images and ideas, for example, others campaign precisely to close them down, to secure their own sense of belonging. There are currently, for example, voluntary associations springing up in the English countryside to campaign against planned asylum accommodation centres. Such groups make appeals to the threat to their own community in order to exclude migrant peoples, with one group arguing that their proximity to a prison and an army base means that they are already subject to 'outside' threats. Indeed, even within a single protest we find some groups securing their own identity by criminalising others, for example consumer activist campaigners on the steps of Niketown in Seattle assisting the police in the identification and arrest of anarchists.<sup>92</sup> In these instances the empowerment of civil society associations is pursued through the disempowerment of others, and the identity of a collective body is secured through the production of insecurity for others.

Finally, and a related point, we wish to emphasise again the unsettled and contested nature of an emergent GCS. As William Connolly has argued, 'a conventional pluralist celebrates diversity within settled contexts of conflict and collective action'.<sup>93</sup> To borrow his framing of the problem, it is our view that the conventional theorist of GCS celebrates diversity and difference within settled, defined and clearly delimited boundaries. In contrast, we ask how these boundaries come to be settled and contribute to what we would describe as GCS as a means of governing. It is the very mapping and contesting of the boundaries of GCS that we feel should receive greater attention in GCS research. To illustrate our point we will draw on Naomi Klein's 'anti-corporate' movement because it looms large in the public imagination of what it means to be resisting the forces of globalisation.

Established through Klein's columns in Toronto's *The Globe and Mail* and her first book *No Logo*, the no logo campaigns have seemed to be the epitome of an open, mobile and multi-issue movement.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, Klein herself notes that, 'rather than a single movement, what is emerging is thousands of movements intricately linked to one another, much as "hotlinks" connect their websites on the Internet'.<sup>95</sup> Yet, Klein is also keen to settle the common context within which these movements operate, arguing that they are 'not demonstrations of one movement but convergences of many smaller ones'. The grounds for convergence are established as a common foe, an identifiable set of forces that all participants are 'against'. 'Look a little closer', she tells us, 'and it's clear that these smaller, targeted movements are

<sup>91</sup> Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization', p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Drainville, 'Quebec City', p. 31.

<sup>93</sup> William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. xiii.

<sup>94</sup> Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (London: Flamingo, 2000).

<sup>95</sup> Naomi Klein, 'Farewell to the "End of History": Organization and Vision in Anti-Corporate Movements', *Socialist Register* (2002), p. 4.



indeed battling the same forces'.<sup>96</sup> It seems that Klein does, after all, wish to establish a settled context for the conflicts of diverse movements. A close study of her website indicates a much more fiercely contested terrain on which the grounds for collective action are fought out.<sup>97</sup> As a self-proclaimed 'critic both of the Israeli occupation and of corporate-dictated globalization', Klein states that 'the globalization movement isn't anti-Semitic, it just hasn't fully confronted the implications of diving into the Middle East conflict'.<sup>98</sup> Again, there is an attempt to find some 'convergence', this time between the Israeli occupation and the actions of MNCs, and Klein finds the answer in 'self-determination: the right of people everywhere to decide how best to organize their societies and economies'. The potential diversity of GCS's political struggles is squeezed into a mould that conforms with the settled view of how things should be.

For us, Klein's desire to define the grounds for the movement's position, amidst a storm of protest in the chat room that followed, demonstrates exactly what Klein seems to deny: the contested nature of GCS as a platform for diverse political struggles. It is the perpetual struggle to define the terms of the movements that, in large part, constitutes the politics of GCS. As the anti-corporate movement again redefines its purpose with the inclusion of 'solidarity with refugees', rather than look for a convergence or a 'common threat', we point to this as the essence of GCS movements – the constant metamorphosis, fracturing, and dissent. Just as Klein seeks to respond to state and corporate attempts to govern the parameters of her movement, so she herself attempts to establish the governmental grounds for the future legitimacy of that movement.

### Concluding remarks

We began this article by commenting on the relationship between academic discussions about what GCS might be and the challenges posed by 'real' world events. It is not that September 11th represents an unprecedented watershed in IR, but rather that it is one instance among many of a provocation to our dominant modes of knowledge. Our approaches to understanding GCS will cast light on some of the dynamics of contemporary world politics, while they leave others in deep shadow. In this way the discourse of GCS constrains and delimits the possibilities for the discussion and practice of global politics. For Mary Kaldor, for example, 'the attacks on September 11th can be understood as an attack on the basic assumptions of global civility'.<sup>99</sup> Yet, presumably they can also be understood as the result of the failure of that 'global civility' to consider those who are excluded or positioned outside its terms. Responses to September 11th in the form of the 'war on terror' have come to rely precisely upon the maintenance of such binaries as good/evil,

<sup>96</sup> Klein, 'Farewell to the End of History', p. 4.

<sup>97</sup> See <[www.nologo.org](http://www.nologo.org)>

<sup>98</sup> Naomi Klein, 'Sharon, Le Pen and anti-Semitism', <[www.nologo.org/article.pl?sid=02/04/24/1319201](http://www.nologo.org/article.pl?sid=02/04/24/1319201)>

<sup>99</sup> Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, p. 148.

civilised/uncivilised, legitimate/illegitimate politics.<sup>100</sup> Yet, to look beyond these binaries is to see that the lines cannot be drawn so easily. The police storming of the London Finsbury Park mosque in 2003, for example, has revealed that a space of religious, civil, and voluntary association embodies multiple and apparently contradictory social and political practices. Similarly, in January 2002, the first female Palestinian 'suicide bomber' was revealed to be a 28 year-old paramedic volunteering for the Red Crescent. A final example of the contradictory practices of GCS is offered by Marieke de Goede who argues that attempts by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to close down terrorist finances runs up against multiple uses of 'underground' Hawala finance – including by development groups and migrant workers.<sup>101</sup> The question then becomes whether we wish to sustain assumptions about legitimate, civil and emancipatory politics on the one hand, and illegitimate, uncivil and extremist politics on the other, or whether we wish to enquire into their simultaneous presence, their contradictions and tensions.

At one level, then, constraints are imposed on critical enquiry by the specific neoliberal representations of responsible and civil subjects, such as those furthered by the major international organisations. We would characterise such a representation of civil society as part of a neoliberal means of governing that disciplines and excludes those who do not conform. It has been the portrayal of GCS as a bounded space of 'non-government', common to the international organisations and some academic commentaries, that has tended to obscure the very 'governing' qualities of GCS to date. Yet, to an extent, critical academic accounts of GCS that focus their attention on the capacity of social movements to counter neoliberal globalisation also neglect to recognise the consequences of their reading for global politics. Whilst the emancipatory potential of GCS is celebrated, the manner in which this assumed transformative capacity is itself open to challenge and contradiction is not explored. In our view, to continue the search for a particular kind of responsible, legitimate and civil global agency is to avert our gaze from the power relations and contestation that lie at the heart of a politicised reading of GCS.

So, what would a more politicised GCS research agenda look like? For us it would be wary of the search for a consolidated GCS, and would treat with caution claims to a fully fleshed-out map of contemporary GCS. Rather, it would attend to the modes of knowledge, dominant discourses and practices that have brought GCS into common currency. To refuse to definitively pin down GCS, and to focus instead on what is done in its name, is also to foreground the interplay between our theories and concepts and empirical research. Better understanding is needed, not only of how the GCS discourse is produced and operates concretely across and within particular institutional settings (such as international organisations and NGOs), but also of how it is translated and redefined at the level of situated experience. It is in the everyday realms of familial, associational, religious or cultural life, for example,

<sup>100</sup> For further discussion see James der Derian, 'In Terrorem: Before and After 9/11', in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne, *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 101–17.

<sup>101</sup> Marieke de Goede, 'Hawala Discourses and the War on Terrorist Finance', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21 (forthcoming, 2003).

that GCS receives its concrete context. We suggest that it is here that the sketch maps of multiple GCSs are being drawn and redrawn, and here where the power relations, tensions and contradictions are being played out.